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8 March 1984



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All portions classified ~~SECRET~~ [redacted]

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The Director of Central Intelligence

Washington, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

TS 843479

9 January 1984

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

FROM : Herbert E. Meyer
Vice Chairman, National Intelligence Council

SUBJECT : A Coordinated USG Approach to Public Disclosure of
New Soviet BCW Efforts

1. As you know, the Wall Street Journal will shortly publish an editorial-page series disclosing new Soviet BCW efforts. (If the newspaper holds to its present schedule, we will publish [] before the series appears.) The fact of coming public disclosure raises the questions of whether and how the U.S. Government should respond to the inevitable inquiries about what we know and what we intend to do. What follows is a summary of current thinking by David Low, [] and STAP members [] both of whom have reviewed the current SNIE drafts. (b)(1) (b)(3) (b)(3)

2. In essence, this topic is an extension, or the next phase, of the development of chemical and biological weapons in general. It therefore must be seen in the context of the public debate on yellow rain, where the U.S. Government has had difficulty establishing its case, particularly among certain scientists who have obtained great media exposure. This difficulty derives from a combination of skepticism and naivete on their part, as well as our inability to disclose totally very sensitive intelligence information which supports the case. One significant difference, however, is that yellow rain use generated a series of legal, treaty violation and human rights issues which are not (yet) involved here. As a result, in that case the U.S. Government was obligated to step forward with its case.

3. Since the new agent development (using state of the art biotechnologies) is still emerging from the R&D phase, it may be even more difficult to win public acceptance for the conclusion that this Soviet program exists or for the prospect of use of those new agents in the future. Furthermore, given the very sensitive-level evidence which supports our paper, we have no choice but to very closely hold our knowledge and conclusions relating to biological agent development. Distribution [] will be carefully restricted. (b)(1) (b)(3)

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4. Contrasting with this concern is (a) the need to inform key policymakers of the serious implications of our analysis, and (b) the desire to demonstrate that the intelligence community in this case is ahead of the issue and well informed.

5. There are additional factors to consider:

a. Much of the U.S. research community in this field, particularly that housed at NIH, suspects that the U.S. has a classified BCW program underway, notwithstanding the decision by President Nixon to shut down our program. Additional publicity which confirms the U.S. intelligence community perception of the Soviet program as being well-along would fuel this concern, on the theory that surely the Pentagon would not allow this condition to go unanswered (at least from the point of view of secret research).

b. The Soviet perception of U.S. capabilities should be considered. Exactly how much they think we know about their program as well as what we want them to think of our own capability (offensively and defensively) must be carefully managed.

c. Too much public play on this issue, including implications that the intelligence community knows more than it will tell, could push the Soviet effort underground, i.e., further into the classified realm. At the moment, much of the technical Soviet work is available in open literature, and a good deal of information exchange takes place at scientific meetings, etc. Higher classification by the Soviets would (a) slow down their access to Western technology, but (b) make our ability to keep track of their program much tougher.

6. Thus, there is a conflict in the approaches which we might take in responding to the public discussion which will be raised by the Wall Street Journal series. Low, [redacted] all feel that, given the background of the yellow rain dialogue, we should do whatever we can to avoid getting into a position where once again we would be trying to back up claims with evidence that cannot be unclassified. This will likely put us in a direct confrontation with State, which probably will seek an unclassified statement of U.S. knowledge on this issue.

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7. It might be useful for members of the National Security Council -- and also HHS Secretary Heckler, whose portfolio includes NIH -- to work out a coordinated approach to dealing with the coming disclosures. Among the features of such an approach would be these:

- The U.S. Government has been aware of Soviet BCW efforts.
- We publish on these efforts, although at a classified level.

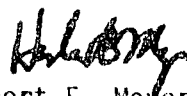
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- We will continue to keep close watch on Soviet BCW efforts.
- While we cannot, for security reasons, confirm or deny the accuracy of the Wall Street Journal series, nothing in the series has come as a surprise to the U.S.


Herbert E. Meyer

VC/NIC/HEMeyer: [redacted]

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